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## Is Pak Power Centre Losing the Script?

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By Bhaskar Roy

When Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif landed in New York for the annual UN General Assembly session, his body language lacked confidence and inspiration. He carried a restricted brief from the GHQ in Rawalpindi – just raise the Kashmir issue and internationalise it. A limited brief, indeed.

No interaction with the Pakistani diaspora in the USA was scheduled. Why? Is the GHQ afraid of the questions they may raise? There was no meeting with the American business community to bring in investments to Pakistan. This road must have been explored but with negative impact. Even the expatriate Pakistani community in the US are both to invest in unstable, turbulent Pakistan where the jihadists are fast emerging as a power pole.

Even before Nawaz Sharif arrived in New York, the pitch was queered by Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ms. Maliha Lodi. On September 9, Lodi wrote a letter to the UN that India was building a 10 foot high, 197 kms long wall along the LOC, against UN resolutions on the Kashmir issue, to seal off Jammu and Kashmir from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), to permanently shelve the Kashmir issue.

Lodi is known to be close to the army and ISI. Her inputs and brief were obviously not prepared by the civilian government in Islamabad. The inputs were taken from a declaration by Sayed Salauddin, the chief of the internationally banned jihadi outfit, the Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), operating in Kashmir. Salauddin is also head of the United Jihad Council, based in Pakistan and Controlled by the ISI.

The letter became a joke in UN circles. More embarrassing for Pakistan was the fact that Pakistan's foreign policy was now being dictated

by jihadi outfits, otherwise known as state-sponsored terrorists.

Nawaz Sharif weakly sought talks with Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, on the Kashmir issue. Desperate, they hoped for a handshake photo opportunity between Sharif and Modi, to bring back a modicum of civility before the international community. But Modi would have none of it, conceding to a wave of his hand towards Sharif.

Modi had gone out of his way to engage Pakistan in a civil and meaningful dialogue, despite opposition in India. He tried to persuade Pakistan to reduce tensions and turn attention towards development through a SAARC cooperative effort, despite severe criticism from BJP insiders. But the Pakistani establishment did not relent and Pakistan's pullback from the Ufa joint statement was the last straw.

A question that begs an answer is why did Nawaz Sharif and his National Security Advisor (NSA) Sartaj Aziz agree to a document which did not mention Kashmir but raised the issue of terrorism? Sharif is no fool and neither is Aziz. Both knew that "Kashmir" was the dearest issue to the Pakistani army and relevant to their hold on power. Sharif was aware that on his return home, the army and jihadis would raise hell.

Sartaj Aziz was at pains to explain the Ufa declaration had Kashmir as the centre point of the declaration. The aim was to scuttle discussions on terrorism and exchange of documents/ evidence on the issue. Although the Pakistani side claimed that they would produce documents as evidence of India-sponsored terrorism in Pakistan, nothing came of it.

It is a well known and well documented fact that jihadi outfits are assets of the Pakistani army. Former army Chief Gen. Asfaq Kayani admitted as much to the Americans, meaning that terrorist organisations like Lashkar-e-Toiba (LET), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JEI) and the Haqqani Network will not be banned and dismantled.

Certainly, Pakistan today is suffering from terrorism. But, again, it is the Pakistani army and ISI that set up terrorist organisations like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) which have gone rogue. Pakistan still controls organisations like the LET, which the world knows was primed by the Pakistani army and ISI to attack Mumbai. Under the leadership of Hafeez Saeed, the LET is ultimately emerging as a nuclear bomb for Pakistan, much worse than the TTP. This is not a tribal organisation like the TTP and now resides in the veins of non-tribal people. Including the armed forces. Hafeez Saeed's charitable organisation, the Jamaat-ud-Dawa is not rearing scientists, technocrats and economists but radicalised young men.

Nawaz Sharif's address to the UNGA has been described by the Pakistani media as a "joke". Sections of educated and liberal Pakistani society, including retired officials like a former foreign secretary are tired of the jaded Kashmir issue. Sharif's four-point "new peace initiative" appears to have been drafted at the GHQ and polished by the foreign ministry. His suggestions to demilitarize Kashmir aims at asking Indian troops safeguarding the Indian side of Kashmir from Pakistani terrorists and militants, to be withdrawn so that Pakistani proxies can have a field day. Withdrawal from Siachen will allow the Pak army to surreptitiously occupy the glacier and expose India's flank to the

Chinese army. Sharif was aware as everybody else that India would not even glance at such proposals.

It would on the other hand, have been appreciated if Sharif, like President Musharraf in 2004 had assured that Pakistani soil would not be allowed to be used against India. Musharraf kept his word, with it he wrote his ouster. Several attempts were made on Musharraf's life from within the military establishment, but were unsuccessful.

Writing in the *Hindu* (August 28, 2015) A. K. Verma, former Chief of RAW, (India's external intelligence agency) disclosed a hitherto secret negotiations between India and Pakistan on permanently settling the border issue. In early 1988, Pakistan's President Zia-ul-Haq expressed concern that by consuming almost 48 percent of the nation's budget, the Pakistani army was depriving citizens of funds which could be used for development and raising people's standard of living. Zia approached the then crown prince Hassan of Jordan to intercede with Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, to facilitate a meeting between the intelligence chiefs of the two nations.

Everything went according to plan. The then ISI chief, Hamid Gul and A. K. Verma met secretly. Maps were drawn and lines drawn upto the Chinese border. Pakistan agreed to withdraw from Siachen glacier. While the deliberations were kept tightly secret in India, Zia had to inform the Pakistani corps commanders, because as former army chief he had to take them on board. Within a few months Zia was killed when the Pak military aircraft he was travelling in, crashed. Knowledgeable sources said that the bomb/ bombs were hidden in a basket of mangoes. The US ambassador to Pakistan, accompanying Zia on the flight, also died. The investigations with American assistance, could not reveal anything on the accident. Very surprising, indeed. Since then Hamid Gul turned viciously anti-India, probably to save himself.

Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister had indicated positive response to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's peace overtures but Kargil happened. Musharraf as army chief removed him in a coup in 1999. When Musharraf turned a page to negotiate a four-point agreement with India on Kashmir, he was ousted in an engineered political agitations.

Musharraf's successor as army chief, Gen. Asfaq Kayani, did not move to take over power and face international criticism or risk sanctions at a time when Pakistan was embroiled in fomenting Taliban militancy in Afghanistan. He was content to control security and neighbourhood foreign policy from behind the scenes. He was the army chief when the Mumbai carnage was carried out by the LET in 2008.

The Pakistani military establishment embarked on a project to re-engineer the ethnic origin of Pakistanis. They started projecting themselves as of Arab descent, to differentiate themselves from people of South Asian/ Indian origin. Gen. Kayani's reportedly told a gathering in Brussels in 2008 that Pakistanis had nothing in common with Indians historically, culturally or in religion. This was a stupid enterprise, revealing the mind of the military establishment to make and keep India as a permanent enemy. Even Gen. Musharraf, (whose ancestral house is in old Delhi) had once said even if the Kashmir issue was resolved, there would be other issues on which Pakistan would continue to fight with India. Basically, having India as a permanent enemy would serve the interest of primacy of the Pak army.

Attitudes in Pakistan are slowly beginning to change, albeit among a handful of liberal and artistic elite. There is a sense of introspection about the state of Pakistan. Writing in the *News International* (Sept. 14, 2015) Shamshad Ahmad, a former foreign secretary who would have led tirades against India in his service years, laments about how things went wrong.

Ahmad sees rule by a few feudal families, corruption, socio-economic injustice and leadership failures have led to terrorism and military domination. Punjabi domination including domination of the Punjabi language caused immense problems, resulting in the loss of East Pakistan (Bangladesh), Ahmad says. His family opted for Pakistan, during partition in 1947, when millions of Muslims migrated to Pakistan, but a large number of Muslims stayed back. Today Ahmad is dismayed and deeply disappointed at Pakistani state of affairs.

Saeed Rasool, a Lahore - based lawyer, wrote in the *Dawn* (Sept 6, 2015) that the single ideology that keeps Pakistan together is “anti-Indianism”, which has become the national identity of the Pakistani people.

A theatre group from Lahore, “Ajoka Theatre”, recently visited India. The four plays they staged are the “four pillars on which our peace-building efforts rest”, said Shaheed Nizam, executive director of Ajoka. Culture, he added, cuts through mental blocks.

These examples are strong statements and would hopefully defeat the alternative narrative that the Pakistani army has been constructing.

It appears that Nawaz Sharif has begun to understand that politicians are being pushed out by terrorist Tanzims, supported by the army. Otherwise Maliha Lodi would not have quoted Sayed Salauddin in her letter to the UN to hit at India.

Sharif is trying to counter the army in his India policy. Otherwise, he would not have agreed to the draft of the Ufa joint statement. We will have to see if he can survive with this line.

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